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ABSTRACT

The Vigo County Public Library studied patron use of the card catalog by reviewing nearly 300 questionnaires completed by student and adult users. The results indicate that the catalog is used equally to find author, title, and subject -- with the latter a bit more prevalent. Most users did not find the filing difficult, and preferred use of the catalog to browsing or asking the librarian for assistance. Fifty-one percent found the information in the catalog adequate, and 76% use the "see" and "see also" references. Tabulated responses and tables of percentages based on the results of the questionnaire are included in this report. (SJ)

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Card Catalog Study
at
Vigo County Public Library

by
Irene Roberts McDonough

Terre Haute, Indiana
1972

LI 004 156

Card Catalog Study

at

Vigo County Public Library

The decision to study patron use of the card catalog at Vigo County Public Library grew out of a Roundtable session at the 1971 Indiana Library Association meeting. At that session, a panel of patrons, chosen at random, discussed public library card catalogs. They did this within the perimeter of the previously posed questions listed below:

1. How do patrons use the catalog?

2. What aspect of the catalog frustrates the patron; i.e. appearance, copyright date, punctuation, etc.

3. What is the minimum catalog card needed to serve a patron?

4. How much do we need to add to the minimum catalog card to assist the librarian in serving the patron?

5. How do we arrange the catalog to meet the patron's needs?

6. How can we decide on basic needs of all patrons of all libraries?

7. How confusing is a long call number over a brief one?

8. Would it be beneficial to the patron if he could go into any library and find the same book always classified the same?

9. What percent of browsing is done by the patron compared to his use of the card catalog?

10. How do we keep up with changes such as will be made in the 18th edition of "Dewey"?

Upon returning to Terre Haute, the staff of Public Services and Technical Services decided to submit a similar questionnaire to the local patrons, with the hope that it would yield some guidelines for future action. Accordingly the following was designed by the three staff members who had worked with the state program:

Responses to Questions on Use of the Card Catalog

6.	Time-consuming	22%
	Hard to use	3%
	Don't understand	9%
7.	Yes	12%
	No	52%
	Some	28%
8.	Yes	48%
	No	14%
	Some	29%
9.	Browsing	54%
	Ask Reference Librarian	49%
	Use card catalog	74%

Ages of Respondents

10.	Under 15 years	10%
	15-25 years	42%
	25-35 years	17%
	35-50 years	15%
	Over 50 years	9%

Division of Ages by Agencies

Under 15 Years

Main	13%
North	9%
South	9%
Meadows	14%
West	--

15 - 25 Years

Main	57%
North	26%
South	26%
Meadows	34%
West	33%

25 - 35 Years

Main	12%
North	30%
South	27%
Meadows	3%
West	50%

35 - 50 Years

Main	7%
North	30%
South	26%
Meadows	21%
West	17%

Division of Ages by Agencies

Over 50 Years

Main	5%
North	9%
South	12%
Meadows	27%
West	--

* The table published in Focus on Indiana Libraries was selected from this table. Vol. XXVII, no. 3, pp. 79-82

** For this tabulation a shortened form of the names of the various agencies is used:

Main - Emeline Fairbanks Memorial Library

North - Plaza North Branch

South - Southland Shopping Center Branch

Meadows - Meadows Shopping Center Branch

West - West Terre Haute Branch

During the month of November, copies of the foregoing were placed in all public service areas, and patrons were requested to fill them out. Weekly compilations of results were made, and at the end of the month totals and percentages were figured.

In interpreting the percentages, it should be noted that in many cases where two answers were checked, they were interpreted as having equal weight. In other cases not every question was answered. Hence, the percentages figured on the basis of 297 respondents seldom total an exact 100 percent.

Surprisingly, the card catalog is used to find author, title, and subject headings almost equally. Another surprise came in the fact that the filing system gave patrons little difficulty. It could be interpreted as a vote for the simplified filing system used at VCPL. Almost 25 percent more patrons attested to using the card catalog in preference to browsing or asking a librarian to find the material. In regard to assistance, in the use of the card catalog, Reference was glad to observe that more than one-half the respondents were satisfied with the assistance they received.

Just 51 percent found the amount of information on the catalog card adequate. This is an area in which the catalog department is attempting to do some re-thinking. The catalogers, also, are giving more attention to "see" and "see also" references since 76 percent of the respondents use them at least some.

Interestingly enough, the study yielded information on the occupations and ages of the borrowers. This was a by-product on which the designers of the project had not counted. The accompanying tables show those figures as well as pinpointing the characteristics of the patrons at each agency. For instance, South's patrons are housewives to a large degree while at Meadows students predominate.

In general, the staff at VCPL sees the study as reflecting trends rather than as yielding absolute findings.

Note - The author of this report is indebted to the many members of the VCPL staff who gave assistance in designing, implementing, and compiling the study.

TABLE OF PERCENTAGES

based on

TOTAL TABULATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE*

Number of Patrons Responding to Questionnaire

Main**	164	55%
North	23	8%
South	74	25%
Meadows	29	10%
West	6	2%
Total	297	

Major Occupations of Respondents

Housewives	15%
Students	43%
Unskilled laborers	6%
Professors & teachers	7%
Professional people	12%
Skilled workers	3%

Division of Two Leading Occupations by Agencies

Housewives

Main	5½%
North	22 %
South	40 %
Meadows	7 %
West	16 %

Students

Main	57%
North	17%
South	20%
Meadows	41%
West	33%

Responses to Questions on Use of the Card Catalog

1.	Author	62%
	Title	63%
	Subject	67%
2.	Numbers	27%
	Copyright Date	8%
	Punctuation	14%
	General Appearance	11%
3.	Sometimes	36%
	Yes	9%
	No	51%
4.	Yes	5%
	No	64%
	Sometimes	24%
5.	Much	10%
	Little	50%
	None	32%

PATRON QUESTIONNAIRE

It is the desire of the Vigo County Public Library to make its CARD CATALOG as useful as possible. Will you please help by completing the following questions:

1. Do you use the catalog to find author___ title___ subject___?

2. Which of these parts of the catalog card do you find hard to interpret: numbers___ copyright date___ punctuation___ general appearance___.

3. Do you need more than the amount of information you find on our catalog cards? Sometimes___ Yes___ No___ If so, what?

4. Do you find the filing of the cards difficult to understand? Yes___ No___ Sometimes___

5. How much trouble is a long call number over a brief one? Much___ Little___ None___

6. Do you avoid use of the card catalog because: it is time-consuming___, hard to use___, don't really understand it___?

7. Would you like more actual assistance in using the card catalog? Yes___ No___ Some___

8. Do you use "see" and "see also" references when you find them in the card catalog? Yes___ No___ Some___

9. How do you find material? Browsing___ Ask reference librarian___ Use card catalog___

10. Please check your age group: under 15 yrs.___, 15-25 yrs.___, 25-35 yrs.___, 35-50 yrs.___, over 50 yrs.___.

11. Please state your occupation _____.

PATRON QUESTIONNAIRE TABULATION

Compiled November 1971

	Questions asked patrons	Main Circ.	Juvenile	North	South	Meadows	West	Total
1.	Author	99	10	20	37	18	2	186
	Title	85	13	23	46	19	3	189
	Subject	103	21	13	40	23	2	202
2.	Numbers	37	10	6	18	7	3	81
	Copyright Date	9	3	5	8	1		26
	Punctuation	19	8	1	12	1	1	42
	General Appearance	20	1	4	4	5		34
3.	Sometimes	59	10	11	16	10	2	108
	Yes	18	5		3			26
	No	59	9	14	52	20	3	157
4.	Yes	11			2	1		14
	No	93	20	13	41	21	2	190
	Sometimes	31	4	9	20	6	3	73
5.	Much	22	3	1	1	3		30
	Little	73	18	9	31	17	3	151
	None	41	3	14	31	8	1	98
6.	Time-consuming	32	8	5	11	8	2	66
	Hard to use	7			2	1		10
	Don't understand	12	1	2	9	2	1	27
7.	Yes	25			10	2		37
	No	67	15	16	33	22	1	154
	Some	37	9	8	23	5	4	86

PATRON QUESTIONNAIRE TABULATION

Compiled November 1971

	Questions asked patrons	Main Circ.	Juvenile	North	South	Meadows	West	Total
8.	Yes	69	12	12	37	12	3	145
	No	20	3	7	9	5		44
	Some	49	9	4	15	10	2	89
9.	Browsing	68	8	16	52	18	3	165
	Ask Reference Librarian	67	7	15	42	14	4	149
	Use card catalog	110	19	22	45	22	3	221
10.	Under 15	10	11	2	7	4		34
	15-25	89	10	6	19	10	2	136
	25-35	18	2	7	20	1	3	51
	35-50	10	1	7	19	6	1	44
	Over-50	9		2	9	8		28
11.	Area Planning			1				1
	Chemical Engineer	1						1
	Civil Service					1		1
	Coal Miner	1						1
	College Student	19	7	1		1		28
	Correctional Officer				1			1
	Cost Estimator	1						1
	Farmer	1					1	2
	Financial Analyst	1						1
	Geochemist			1				1
	Housewife	9		5	29	2	1	46
	Industrial Engineer	1						1

PATRON QUESTIONNAIRE TABULATION
Compiled November 1971

	Questions asked patrons	Main Circ.	Juvenile	North	South	Meadows	West	Total
11.	Janitor					1		1
	Jeweler	1						1
	Lab Technician	2			1			3
	Librarian	2				2		4
	Library Clerk	1						1
	Library Page	2						2
	Machinist	1						1
	Mechanic			1				1
	Minister						1	1
	No Answer	16			6	1	1	24
	Nurse			1	4	1		6
	Nurses Aid			1	3			4
	Pharmacist Assistant				1			1
	Plant Employee			1				1
	Plant Manager	1						1
	Printer	1						1
	Professional Golfer				1			1
	Professor	2		1				3
	Railroad Employee	3			1	1		5
	Retired	1		1	5			7
	Sales Executive	1						1
	Secretary	2		1	1	2		6
	Service Station			1				1
	Social Insurance Rep.			1				1

PATRON QUESTIONNAIRE TABULATION

Compiled November 1971

	Questions asked patrons	Main Circ.	Juvenile	North	South	Meadows	West	Total
11.	Social Worker	1						1
	Store Clerks	3		3	3			9
	Store Manager				1			1
	Student	53	16	3	15	11	2	100
	Student Nurse	1						1
	Student Teacher	1	2					3
	Teacher	8			1	6		15
	U.S. Army	1						1
	Unskilled Laborer	1						1
	Welder				1			1

Survey Compiled

by

Vigo County Public Library

November 1971

VCPL Learns About Card Catalog from Citizens

Nearly 300 patrons of the Vigo County Public Library filled out questionnaires during one recent month to give the library information on making its card catalog as useful as possible to the community, according to Mrs. Irene McDonough.

Mrs. McDonough, head of the Technical Services Department, which is in charge of the card catalog, says that her department "was plesently surprised to find that persons in Vigo County had less difficulty finding what they wanted in the library card catalog than the department had supposed."

Questionnaire results showed that sixty-four per cent did not find the filing difficult, twenty-four per cent only sometimes, while five per cent found the filing hard to understand. (Not all respondents filled out all questions asked.) Easy location of cards appeared to be equally true whether the users were hunting author, title or subject cards.

Interpretation of the cards in the catalog did seem to cause some problems, Mrs. McDonough feels. About twenty - seven per cent found the numbers hard to interpret, with fourteen per cent having trouble with the punctuataion and eight per cent with the copyright date. "For some reason," Mrs. McDonough says, "people confuse the copyright date with the call number."

The questionnaire, designed to discover what problems local community users have, brought results that showed the majority of patrons do not need more information than is given or more help in using the catalog itself. Results showed only nine per cent need more information and twelve per cent more assistance. However, twenty - two per cent avoided use of the card catalog because, as they indicated, it is too time-consuming.

Mrs. McDonough feels the Technical Services Department will try to put in more "see" and "see also" references because the questionnaire revealed that fourty-eight per cent of the patrons filling them out do use "see" references and twenty-nine per cent sometimes do. "This type of card requires extra work and more cards, so we are glad to know people are using them," she says. "It is also very encouraging to us to learn that seventy-four per cent of the respondents do use the card catalog and find many of the respondents do use the card catalog and find many of their library materials through this method."

The questionnaire also asked for the respondent's occupation. Results showed the majority of users were housewives, students, and professional people. Occupations ranged over 47 types including such persons as a professional golfer, a geochemist, correctional officer, farmer, printer, mechanic, laboratory technician, machinist, sales executive, coal miner and railroad employee. About forty-two per cent of these users were 15-25 years of age; seventeen per cent were 25-35; fifteen per cent were 35-50; nine per cent over 50 and ten per cent under 15.

Questionnaire findings will be used to formulate department policy in the future maintenance of the card catalog system in the Vigo County Library.

Vigo County Public Library In Spotlight

THE TRIBUNE-STAR, TERRE HAUTE, IND. • SUNDAY, SEPT. 10, 1972 73

"Focus on Indiana Libraries" focuses on the Vigo County Public Library in three articles appearing in the current quarterly issue.

Two surveys conducted by Mrs. Irene McDonough, technical services department head, and the VCPL Mediamobile project directed by Harmon Boyd, extension services head, are featured stories in the most recent issue of the Indiana Library Association official magazine.

"The Periodical Problem" written by Mrs. McDonough, describes the study she made of periodical magazine agencies, and gives lists of the information received as the result of her survey. Guidelines for action also are outlined in this article.

"Card Catalog User Survey" is the second of two articles by Mrs. McDonough in this issue of focus. It tells the results of a patron questionnaire in which the library asked persons using the card catalog to answer questions which could help the VCPL learn how patrons used the catalog and whether they found the filing of other aspects of the card catalog difficult to use or interpret. The questionnaire and the percentage results based on tabulation of the questionnaire are both given in the published article.

She also points out the questionnaire results were published in the local papers earlier this year.

An account of the two-year federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) grant to the Vigo County Library for mediamobile service to local urban community centers and rural communities is also included in the third quarter issue of Focus. It describes the modification of the former VCPL bookmobile to handle a full range of media in order to demonstrate the potential of new forms of information and equipment in the public library program.

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"Focus on Indiana Libraries" is edited by Larry DeVos, Ball State University Library, is indexed in Library Literature and available on microfilm from University Microfilms. It is in its 26th year of publication.

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Late breaking news from the offices of Library Journal/School Library Journal

October 2, 1972
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PATRON USE OF CATALOG STUDIED: Here's just one of the many useful things we found in the latest issue of that good quarterly Focus on Indiana Libraries: it's the report of a study carried out at the Vigo County Public Library and the results are surprising, to say the least. Here's a brief rundown: people used the catalog about equally to find author, title, or subject--with the latter a little in the lead. Most of them did not find filing difficult. Those who did had more trouble with the numbers on the cards than anything else. Patrons split about even on whether or not they used "see" and "see also" references. Generally, they didn't feel the need for more information than was given on the cards. Most, also, didn't want any more assistance in using the catalog. Those who avoided using the thing mostly did so because it was "time consuming." And the people queried were roughly evenly divided between students and older adults. The results, naturally, reflect the attitudes of people who felt confident enough to use the library in the first place; even at that they're eye-opening.